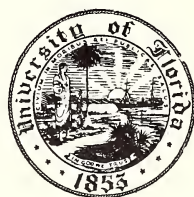





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Poetry By Rolfe Humphries

GREEN ARMOR ON GREEN GROUND

POEMS, COLLECTED AND NEW

THE AENEID OF VIRGIL: A VERSE TRANSLATION

THE WIND OF TIME

FORBID THY RAVENS

THE SUMMER LANDSCAPE

OUT OF THE JEWEL

EUROPA, AND OTHER POEMS, AND SONNETS

GYPSY BALLADS

(Translation from Lorca)

THE POET IN NEW YORK

(Translation from Lorca)

AND SPAIN SINGS

(With M. J. Bernardete)



GREEN ARMOR
ON
GREEN GROUND



REEN ARMOR ON GREEN GROUND

"Cofwch, Sais, os yw'r degwm

Byw yng Nghymru prudd a trwm

Y mae canu yn y cwm."

Poems in the Twenty-four Official Welsh Meters

and

Some, in Free Meters, on Welsh Themes

by

ROLFE HUMPHRIES

Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956

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A

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Of the poems in this collection, *The New Yorker* first published
those appearing on the following pages: 3, 15, 16, 17, 23, 50, 54,
56, 61, 62

Y mae'r llyfr hwn i Ddyddgu—

fy nyolch a fy ngharu.

Acknowledgment is made to the following magazines wherein
some of these poems first appeared:

Atlantic Monthly
Botteghe Oscure
The Colorado Quarterly
Harper's Bazaar
The Hudson Review
The Ladies' Home Journal
The New Yorker
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Introduction

WHAT WE KNOW of the Welsh seems mighty little, compared with what we think we know of the Scotch or Irish. An invidious nursery rhyme; some lampoonery, not without rough admiration, in Shakespeare: what else? A contumacious people, they seem to have been, the Cymri, confederates never any longer than they had to be, fighting with, and beaten by, Romans, Saxons, Normans, Danes, Irish, turning around, as often as not, and mauling their oppressors, coming home victorious, to betray their leaders and fall to feuding, repeating the cycle. Yet, at their best, a people seemly and brave; you could never, says Powys, really bribe them or really scare them. They possessed, he adds, an intense delight in little things; and no less an authority than the Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Museum refers to them as "buoyant, gay, and sensuous, fond of bright colors and eager for life." That, to be sure, may have been before coal mines and Calvinism, but to this day, we know, they are great honorers of music and song.

Of their literary tradition we are also considerably in the dark. Taliesin, one of their bards, gave, we have heard, the architect Frank Lloyd Wright the name of



POEMS

in the Twenty-four

Official Meters

For My Ancestors

(Cyhydedd fer)

Wales, which I have never seen,
Is gloomy, mountainous, and green,
And, as I judge from reading Borrow,
The people there rejoice in sorrow,
Dissenters, most of them, and cranks,
Surly and churlish, grudging thanks,
Suspicious, dour, morose, perplexed,
And just a little oversexed.
Mostly, however, they go in
More for remorsefulness than sin,
The latter being prior to
The real delight, of feeling blue.
Fellows named Morgan, Evans, Jones,
Sit glumly on the ancient stones,
And men with names in —IES,
Like mine, lurk in the wilderness
With conscience riding on their shoulders
Heavier than the native boulders.
The weather veers from dim to foul,
The letter W's a vowel;
They dig in mines, they care for sheep,
Some kinds of promises they keep;
They can remember warriors found

Dead in green armor on green ground;
They practice magic out of season,
They hate the English with good reason,
Nor do they trust the Irish more,
And find the Scots an utter bore.

However grim their life, and hard,
One thing they dearly love, a bard.
Even the meanest hand at lays
Is plied with ale, and crowned with bays,
And set with honor in their books
Above even liars, thieves, and crooks.
This is the one redeeming grace
That saves them for the human race,
This is their claim to virtue; therefore,
Though there is much I do not care for
In my inheritance, I own
This impulse in my blood and bone,
And so I bend a reverent knee,
O Cymric ancestor, to thee,—
Wild Wales forever! Foul or fair,
This tribute from a grateful heir.

In Praise of Tenby

(Englyn Penfyr)

High over the sea stands a fine stronghold,
Old, but less old than the long
Beat and boom of ocean song

At its base, where each ninth comber breaks loud
With proud outcry, flinging foam
At the great gray cliff, the home

Of sea-mew, osprey, ern. And there, up high,
Sky-near, walled well, is a fair
Fine gathering, with good share

Of meat for all, and Oh, plenty of mead
Indeed, for bards from the glen,
For harpers and singing men.

They have climbed wet stair, dark shale, in pride and
glory,
From the low drone of the tide
To the promontory's wide

Mansions of music, where singing wood and voice,
Rejoicing in brotherhood,
Sound their great glee, the full flood

Poured to the sky, above the soaring bird,
Or heard below on the shore
With ocean's old rush and roar

Subdued, the mournful measures fading under
The thunder of this cascade,
This jubilation's cadence.

Around Thanksgiving

(Englyn Milwr)

Pure gold, they said in her praise:
So I walk my autumn ways,
Around me a golden haze

From the ground, in leaves, in air—
Oh, everywhere, everywhere!—
To save, to spend, and to share.

By the door, with evening light,
Westering, lingering late
Over lane and lawn and lot

The leaves of the lilac hold
The shape of the heart, *pure gold*,
As if I need to be told,

As if I need reminding,
Toward chill November's ending,
Of warmth and love abounding.

Shaft and Wings of the Way It Was Once

(Englyn unodl union)

Luerius, King of the Arverni,
Riding, near or far,
Had huntsmen, hounds, and harpers
Round his silver-mounted car.

In his high hall, at the head table, there
Was where his high bard fed.
The king's son gave him bread
And a princess poured his mead.

Twenty-four gold crowns he was always given
When a girl wed in the hall.
All raids conveyed him spoil,
A red bull or a black bull.

Stallion or falcon, greyhound, swan, or bow,
Or a book to look upon,
Or a bright jewel-stone,
For the asking, were his own.

Around him younger men, in green linens,
With golden torques, were seen
Learning to link the tune
Quietly for the queen.

No churl's son could learn these three professions:
Futile for one to be
Scholar or smith, or essay
The arts of poetry.

They trained, the bards, and drank with fighters, rode
On raids by day or by night.
They tripled what they taught.
They fought as well as they wrote.

Tough and gay, they had the gift and the knack,
The know of it all, the craft,
The light in the heart, the lift
Of music when they laughed.

The wildness of the sea they were in fight,
Fine nets for the love of girls.
So it was once in the world.
What are we,—sons of churls?

For a Wordfarer

(Englyn Unodl Crwca)

Speak them slowly, space them so:
Say them soft, or sing them low,
Words whose way we may not know any more.
Still, before the days go,

Sing them low, or say them soft.
Such a little while is left
To counterpoint the soundless drift of Time,
Let rhyming fall and lift.

Space them so, with lift and fall
Decent in their interval,
Late, archaic, who could say?—but always
Graceful, musical.

The Lament of Llywarch Hen

(Englyn Cyrch)

Wooden staff, the time has come
Of the fall of leaf, autumn.
Bracken reddens; all those men
Who praised Llywarch Hen are dumb.

Ere my back was bent, I led
Men in war; that is ended.
Straight and tough, my spear was good,
Sure to draw first blood, bright red.

Wooden staff, now I have no
Smooth white arm for my pillow.
Not one slender one, or sly,
Waits to watch where I might go.

Ere my back was bent, I had
More than one canty comrade.
All the lusty men of Wales
Drew me free what ales they had.

Wooden staff, my bed is hard;
Stubble pales; birds fly southward.

No one visits me, no girl;
No man hails me, churl or bard.

Ere my back was bent, I once
Took delight in bay stallions,
Raced and rode with Llawr and Gwen,
Two upstanding men, my sons.

Wooden staff, when Llawr and Gwen
Fell in fight, I was broken.
Field is barren, fire is cold
For all sonless older men.

Coughing, misery, old age
Rack me now, do me damage.
Carrion am I, no less,
In my wilderness or cage.

From the hour he left the womb
Llywarch carried one heirloom,
Grief and labor, a great load
Down his lonely road of doom.

Merioneth

(Englyn proest dalgryn)

In that sweet, mild western air
Castle stones are russet fire,
Wind goes gentle, water clear,
A minute is a quarter hour.

Golden broom on mountainside,
Golden gorse along the road,
Rowan, oak, and alder shade
Lower ground with globe of cloud.

While their afternoon wears on,
Old men, sitting in the sun,
Warm on ankle bone and shin,
Do not envy any man.

Slanting over shire and shore,
Cader Idris, Traeth Mawr,
Light is rich, though folk be poor,
In that sweet, mild western air.

Benison

(Englyn lleddfbroest)

Though her breathing seem a sigh
Never break her slumber's joy.
Sleep is caring for her now;
Sleep will do as much for you.

Be the weather fair or foul,
Sleep together, sleep a while.
Angels at the vestibule
Wait with honey, wine and oil,

For the wakeners to use
In fulfillment of their vows
On their pilgrimage to joys
Pleasanter than Paradise.

Gently, lovers, turn and join,
So commingle, so commune,
While the good Saint Valentine
Sends his holy blessing down.

A Chain-Charm for a Lady

(Englyn Proest Gadwynog)

Water-bulrush, water-willow
From the margin of the hollow
Shade thy bed and shape thy pillow,
Time be slow and apple-mellow.

If the sun to cloud hath gone
Take the shadow for thy gain;
Wait thy moment; soon the lawn
Glows and goldens, very soon.

In the wind at evening, hear
More than air gather, pour
Water-music for the ear
Of the fonder listener.

Count from one to seven, slowly;
Look up bold, or look down shyly;
Dream of asphodel and moly
Growing in an ancient valley.

Cadence break, or cadence bind
High in air or under ground,
Past the measure of the mind,
Out of reach of any hand.

Harp Music

*(The alternate stanzas, respectively,
Awdl gywydd, and Cywydd
deuair hirion)*

Softly, let the measure break
Till the dancers wake, and rise,
Lace their golden shoes, and turn
Toward the stars that burn their eyes.

Softly, let the measure flow,
Float in silver, and follow.

Softly, let the measure dwell
Slowly, as the spell is wound
Out and in, through space and time,
While the sandals rhyme the round.

Softly, let the measure stir,
Lift, subside, and go under.

Softly, let the measure prove
The bright cadence moving there
Changing, for unbroken dark,
The illumined arc of air.

Softly, let the measure be
Unheard, but never wholly.

Cymric Love Song

(*Cywydd deua'r hirion*)

On the side of a hill
In the month of April

I was with her
In wonderful weather.

Do you ask me to tell
Of myth or of marvel?

No one said *No!*
From height or from hollow.

In what other country
Would I rather be?

Or whose way of moving
Should I more sing?

I will dwell on her praise
For now and for always.

*From the Green Book of Yfan**

(Cywydd deuair fyrion)

Margaret Morse,
Mistress of horse,
Marshalled a troop
Matched, head to croup,
Marched through the dales
Mauling all males.

Normandy's knights,
Noting such sights,
Never drew rein
Not till they came
North to the firth
Now called the Forth.

* The Green Book of Yfan, the proper name being either an archaic form of Evan or a truncated version of Myfanwy (scholars are uncertain) is a manuscript of highly dubious provenance and authenticity. Its few tattered and defaced pages contain little of poetic worth. The fragment above was presumably part of a longer alphabetical chronicle like the medieval *Battle of Fontenoy*. It seems possible that through a scribe's error two entirely different poems have been here confused, for the tone of the O, P, and possibly R, stanzas seems markedly unlike the rest.

Ocean and oar
Opened no door.
Over the weirs
Omens and fears,
Odors of mould.
Only the old

Pity the proud.
Purple through cloud,
Peregrines knife,
Plummet and dive.
Pards on the prowl
Pybass * the owl.

Quentin the Queer,
Quaffing his beer,
Quoted a million
Quips from Quintilian.
Quince-tree and pear
Quavered in air.

Rolfe, for renown,
Wrote this all down,
Runes on a page
Rotting with age,
Ruined by Time,
Ruthless to rhyme.

* In verbs of this highly spondaic quality it is permissible license, for metrical effect, or by special dispensation from the *Penkerdd*, or Chief Poet, to transpose initial consonants, providing they are mute plosives, or plosive mutes.

Cycle

(*Cywydd deuair fyrion*)

Bells in autumn
Toll a rhythm
Slow and solemn
Calling welcome
To the kingdom
Of the lonesome.

Can a sound throw
Any shadow?
The sift of snow
Fills the furrow.
Whose white arrow
Fells the hero?

No trace of her,
Morning's daughter,
Here or yonder.
The pale watcher
By green water
Knows the answer.

The bells of spring
Will be ringing,
Branches blossom,
And she will come
Out of darkness,
All bright, to bless,
Heal and hallow,
And, as we know,
Evoke new stir,
Growth and wonder.

The Champion

(*Cywydd llosgyrnog*)

Beyond the outskirts of the town
The buses park, the folk step down.
Who wins the crown of the bard?
Now every inch of Rhyll's green sod
Is taken for the Eisteddfod:
The test, by God, will be hard.

The match is on; no football game,
No tennis tournament,—the aim
For which they came being song.
The music, rising wave on wave,
Gives, more than combat ever gave,
Proof of the brave and the strong.

Robed in their blue or white or green,
Solemn and bearded, tall and lean,
Of Druid mien, the old men,
One in a golden corselet, go,
Better to listen, to and fro,
Over and over again.

Late in the day, they summon one
To honor's place, the golden throne,
There to be known as the best.
Hebog, the Hawk, puts on the crown
As the six-foot sword is drawn, sheathed, drawn,
And the sun goes down in the west.

Winter, Old Style

(Rhympunt)

Keen is the wind,
Barren the land.
A man could stand
On a single stalk.

Cattle are lean,
The stag is thin,
All color wan
On the frozen lake.

Idle the shield
On an old man's shoulder.
Halls are cold.
I have a wound.

Where warriors go
I cannot follow
Through flying snow
In this wild wind.

The trees are bowed
In the bare wood;
There is no shade
In any vale.

The reeds are dry
And a loud crying
Howls outside
The horse's stall.

The light is short.
Sorrow and hurt
Harry the heart
With inward war.

So an old man
Does what he can,
Stares through the pane
At night's black square.

The Labyrinth

(Byr a thoddaid)

Dark is this maze wherein I err.
No Theseus I; no comforter,
No Ariadne at my side, to hold
Her golden skein as guide.

Dark is this maze; I cannot see
The sword held out in front of me.
I have no shield; my other arm must find
The blind way through this harm.

Dark is this maze, roofed in, with vault and stair
Where I must often halt,
Descend or climb, wait, listen, hear
The skipping heartbeat of my fear.

Dark is this maze, but I must know it more,
Explore, before I go
Free to the light, the pit, the den,
Whose two-formed monster feeds on men.

I hear him bellow, far from here.
I feel, I smell him, very near.
I spin, I strike a blow that finds no mark.
Dark is this maze. I know.

The Lore of Pryderi

(*Clogyrnach*)

Follow the feather down the air,
Save fernseed from the maidenhair,
Study on the tide
Straws that drift and slide
Down the wide ocean stair

Or to the darker forest go,
Step quietly, but sure, but slow,
Find on rock the pale
Silver track of snail,
Seek the frail print of doe.

Pryderi learned this, taught this, knew
Much more than Powyl meant him to,
Marvels on the most
Solitary coast,
Host on host, fire in dew,

Brightness in dark, and bread in stone,
So, bred of Sorrow's flesh and bone,
Wisdom, grown, retains
All his father's gains,
Adds domains all his own.

Oh, mist and moss and feather and fern,
As all King Wisdom's minstrels learn,
In the darkest days,
Flash their motes of praise,
Glow and blaze, shine and burn.

Wmffre the Sweep

(Cyhydedd Narw Ban)

Wmffre the Sweep was mad as a mink,
Covered with cinders, blacker than ink,
Didn't mind darkness, didn't mind stink;
Light was his loathing, light made him blink
Coming through crevice, cranny or chink.
Drank through his whiskers, dust in his drink.

Wretched the ways of Wmffre the Sweep:
Little to gain, and nothing to keep;
Labor was plenty, labor was cheap,
Filthy the flues, and chimneys were steep;
Grimy, red-eyed, unable to weep,
Home to his pallet, ugly in sleep.

Wmffre the Sweep beheld a strange sight
In his day's dark or in the real night:
Ninety-nine angels, harnessed in light,
Michael among them, bearded and bright,
Majesty moving, melody, might—
Wmffre the Sweep was inspired to write.

Wmffre the Sweep, a lout and a clod,
Fed all his life on cabbage and cod,
Housed in a hovel, never well-shod,
Shouldering buckets, besoms and hod,
Shovelled, like all men, under the sod,
Left a great poem, praise of his God.

*Dafydd ap Gwilym Hates
Dyddgu's Husband*
(*Cyhydedd Hir*)

'Tis sorrow and pain,
'Tis endless chagrin
For Dafydd to gain
His dark-haired girl.
Her house is a gaol,
Her turnkey a vile
Sour, yellow-eyed, pale
Odious churl.

She cannot go out
Unless he's about,
The blackguard, the lout,
The stingy boor.
The look in her eye
Of fondness for me—
God bless her bounty!—
He can't endure.

I know he hates play:
The greenwood in May,
The birds' roundelay,
Are not for him.

The cuckoo, I know,
He'd never allow
To sing on his bough,
Light on his limb.

The flash of the wing,
The swell of the song,
Harp-music playing,
Draw his black looks.
The hounds in full cry,
A race-horse of bay,
He cannot enjoy
More than the pox.

My heart would be glad
At seeing him laid
All gray in his shroud;
How could I grieve?
Should he die this year,
I'd give him, with cheer,
Good oak for his bier,
Sods for his grave.

O starling, O swift,
Go soaring aloft,
Come down to the croft
By Dyddgu's home.
This message give her,
Tell her I love her,
And I will have her,
All in good time.

The Tylwyth Teg

(Toddaid)

The Tylwyth Teg live in caves and mountains;
Far under the waves they fold their herds.
As beautiful as the day, their women
Are wise in the way of beasts and birds.

If won as wives by the folk in valleys,
They will bring good luck; they understand
Simples and herbs, and in harvest season
Helpers come far at their command.

The Tylwyth Teg are not above stealing
The corn they love, or churns, or rings,
Or feathers, or veils, or leather harness—
Light-fingered they are at taking things.

On a market-day they may come to town.
It's a rule of thumb that trade is good
Whenever they do, but one thing for sure,
And no use being misunderstood,

They will talk in signs, they will say no word,
And one thing more, pay the closest heed
Never to let them be touched with iron,
From iron they flee with panic speed.

There are bad ones among the Tylwyth Teg:
They will leave their children in your cot
When their brats be ugly, and take your own
Before you can wake, as like as not.

From Llyn y Fan Fach, from Carmarthenshire,
From near and from far, from Llyn Du'r Addu,
From Llyn y Forwyn, from Aberglaslyri,
These stories we hear; they must be true.

Llanelly Cottage

(Gwarwdodyn)

A light-capped sea, and a bird-bright shore—
Whatever else was I looking for,
With sun at my back, blue sky above me?
A dark-haired girl by an open door.

A dark-haired girl in a scarlet dress,
An invitation from loveliness:
Will you touch me deep, will you share my sleep,
Will you come, or keep me comfortless?

The sun at my back, blue sky above,
But over that sill who would not move?
For the light-capped sea and the bird-bright shore
Said never a word against my love.

The scarlet dress came over her head,
Her skin was as white as her silken bed:
Whisper me softly, pleasure me deftly,
Leave me not swiftly, she said, she said.

The sea, light-capped, and the shore, bird-bright,
By day outdoors are a shining sight,
But a scarlet dress, over chair or floor,
Silk bed, and dark hair, are fine for night.

The Runes of Arholfan Cymro

(*Gwawdodyn Hir*)

Cloud over hill, cloud over hollow:
Why do you wait beside your window?
The south wind sighs, a sound of sorrow.
From far away the faint horns echo.
The hours are long, the daylight slow to leave.
For the moment, grieve in the shadow.

Darkness may be the time. The quarrel
Wants resolution. Light the candle,
Be gowned in red and gold apparel,
Murmur, *Deliver us from evil*,
And cross the sill, descend the marble stair,
Pause there and pose there, not too mournful.

Hear, over the music or under,
The wonderful wish of the water,
Reunion of lover and lover
In the light, the ardor of summer,
Not very high and not very far,
And all a green arbor and bower.

Cloud on the moor, cloud on the mountain:
The apples fall; the torches darken;
The guards resume their ancient station.
Lord God, why did you make the craven?
There was a time when wounded men were proud,—
Cloud over dune, cloud over ocean.

The Sons of St. David

(Hir a Thoddaid)

*—Lie still, ye thief, and hear the lady sing
in Welsh.*

The first part of King Henry IV, Act
III, Scene 1.

Lie still, ye thief, and hear the lady sing
In her own language, the confederates' tongue
Old Llywarch used, and Heledd, for their longing—
Blossom on branch, and osprey on the wing,
And Olwen's footprint in the morning mist.
Lie still, ye thief; listen to the song.

Lie still, lie still; and hear harp-music, far
Beyond Time's arras, feud, betrayal, war,
Bereavement and self-pity—all they are,
And all they were, they faced. They said, *Yea, sure!*
Look you, they said; they looked both near and high.
Lie still, ye rogue, lie still; hear the air.

Lie still, and listen, for the Cymri know
Measures of mirth and melodies of sorrow,
The dragon's track, drawn red across the snow,
White hawthorn, golden pear, the darker shadow
A girl's hair makes above the pillow's mound.
Hearken to the sound, and its echo.

Lie still, ye silly flouter of Glendower.
A fair young queen sings in her summer bower,
An old man in the winter of his power
Fingers the harp-strings, and the golden shower,
The golden rain, descends to light our dark.
Lie still, Hotspur; hearken for an hour.

Aderbovey Music

(Cyrch a chwta)

The bells of Aberdovey
Sound from a buried city
Sunken far under the sea,
Heard when the nights are stormy
And carried inland, faintly,
As far as Montgomery.
Hearken! Music of the lost
Haunts that coast, all shadowy.

And there could be voices there,
Leagues and fathoms down, a choir
Whose intoning reaches far
Out along that lonely shore
Up to ghostly cloud and air,
Cadences profound and pure,
Solemn choral, when the bell
Has tolled the knell of the hour.

As winds on earth go over,
Aeolian-wise, to stir
Response of harp or zither,
So, under ocean-water,
Currents deeper and stronger
Sweep strings of salt and silver
In their ultramarine room,
Break off, resume, and linger.

Hearken again! Is the lull
Pause of canticle or bell,
Rest or silence? Who can tell?
During this calm interval
The stones of sarn and sea-wall
Come closer; call to them, call
The music, sound or echo,
From undertow and ground-swell.

Oak

(Tawddgyrch cadwynog)

It is lonely.
In these short days
Without her praise
I, too, grow less.

The Druids' tree
Is far more wise
In the mean ways
Of wintriness,

Clings to the leaf,
However dry,
Will not deny
By letting go.

Seasons are brief,
Sorrow goes by;
Hold on till May,
This will be over.

This will be gone,
Hill, field, and stream
Ripple and gleam
In supple gloss

Of shining sun,
And waking seem
A healing dream,—
Oh yes, oh yes!



POEMS

in the

Free Meters

Rhonabwy's Dream

Owain ap Urien,
Prince of Rheged,
Bade his banner
Be raised again;
Rallied his ravens,
Thrice a hundred,
A black bane
To Arthur's army.

Owain and Arthur
Studied each other
Over the chess-board
Made all of silver.
"Owain," said Arthur,
"Forbid thy ravens."
"Play thy game, Lord!"
Said Owain.

The wingèd warriors
Far from forbidden
By that banner
Rose up, wrathful;

Tumult and triumph
Took them and tossed them,
Fierce in their fury
From hurt and pain.

Over the chess-board
Owain and Arthur,
Poring, marvelled,
Paused and hearkened.
"Owain," said Arthur,
"Forbid thy ravens."
"Play thy game, Lord!"
Said Owain.

The weather darkened.
To Arthur's side
A knight came riding,
All flame and scarlet,
Whose lance, blue-shafted,
From point to haft
Was darker dyed
With blood and plumage.

"Carest thou not,
O King," he cried,
For thy young men slain,
For thy household's damage?"
"Owain," said Arthur,
"Forbid thy ravens."
"Play thy game, Lord!"
Said Owain.

From the board of silver,
Very slowly,
With thumb and finger
Arthur lifted
One golden bishop.
In Arthur's fist
The golden bishop
Crumbled to dust.

Then Owain beckoned
His younger brother,
A prince of Rheged,
Giving the order
To have his banner
Lowered again.
So it was lowered,
And peace did reign.

The Druids

In the evenings, in the clearings, in the forest
That is where they often would be found,
Tall under the low dull solemn oaks, but shorter
Than their shadows falling on the ground.

Exempt from war, if they went down in battle,
They would refuse all aid;
They were versed in many mysteries, and music
Was what they always made;

And in time of peace, they were very good with the
oar,
And soft with women, silent in any grief;
And they also knew the use of the beater's maul
On the pliant golden leaf.

Variation on a Theme from Francis Kilvert

*The Welsh harp has no silver string,
And it is played on the left shoulder.
And the harpers all are older
Than the counsellors of the king.*

*And they are becoming rare,
Those gray and bearded men
With young hands and long fingers,*

*But every here and there,
By glade or coombe or glen,
One of them lingers*

*Remote from all known ways
Save those that music clears
Through ash and sycamore
To the door of their dwelling.*

*Whenever one of them plays,
Whoever hears him hears
Most beautiful old airs.*

*They are poor of purse; they rise
May mornings, very early,
And tradesmen think they are surly
In spite of the wrinkled eyes
Scored by years of smiling.*

Air, from the Old Welsh

Like seaweed under water,
The uneventful trees
Move at my window
In the mist of the morning.

If I could count the leaves
And multiply them by
The number of seasons left me,
And were every leaf a love,
There would still not be enough
To have before I die.

Ah, what stubborn stuff
I waken to find
In the cells of the mind
On the sills of the morning.

“*A Green Pride*”

A green pride of green leaves
Was all about that summer place,
While the hour of the sheaves
Waited, over the hill

Whose pretence of being far,
Far in time, far in space,
Lulled and held summer still.
Still, the flower was the flower,

Not one petal falling.
Motion left to the air,
To the paper-thin veer
Of the butterfly's going.

A green pride of green leaves
Over arbor, lawn, bower,
And the hour of the sheaves,
Even so, coming closer.

Song from the Gaelic, Maybe

The fond summer numbers
Fade from eye and ear;
The angler in the stream
Is no more there.
For all one remembers
The sigh comes easy,
The long-drawn sigh
For the green wish of summer
Going by, gone by—
Dream and illusion,
Illusion and dream,
And the fisherman gone
Like the fly from the stream.

In the streets of the town
People appear
Dressed for the season
In jackets and sweaters.
So many good creatures!
And some of them, cheery

Out of all reason—
(Oh, not you! And not I!)—
Stoutly maintain,
Avow and aver
And insist on declaring
The white wall of winter
Is also a lie.

Dafydd ap Gwilym Resents the Winter

Across North Wales
The snowflakes wander,
A swarm of white bees.
Over the woods
A cold veil lies.
A load of chalk
Bows down the trees.

No undergrowth
Without its wool,
No field unsheeted;
No path is left
Through any field;
On every stump
White flour is milled.

Will someone tell me
What angels lift
Planks in the flour-loft
Floor of heaven,
Shaking down dust?
An angel's cloak
Is cold quicksilver.

And here below
The big drifts blow,
Blow and billow
Across the heather
Like swollen bellies.
The frozen foam
Falls in fleeces.

Out of my house
I will not stir
For any girl
To have my coat
Look like a miller's
Or stuck with feathers
Of eider down.

What a great fall
Lies on my country!
A wide wall, stretching
One sea to the other,
Greater and grayer
Than the sea's graveyard.
When will rain come?

Night Song of Dafydd ap Gwilym

All this I was doing
Over a girl,
In loneliness going
Across the bare moor
And through the blind night
In the pitch of the darkness,
Lost from the high road.

Through many ridged fields,
Down slopes that were soggy,
Over stubble and furrow
With stumble and sorrow,
Through nine thorny thickets,
By ruined old forts,
To the brow of the mountain,

And missing the bogs
And their green habitation
Whose hateful companions
Circled around me,
A fighter betrayed
In the thick of the battle,
A man in a gaol.

But worse than the fogs
And all desolation

Were the spirits of evil
Circling around me,
And my crossing and praying,
My charming and rhyme
Of little avail.

This took a long time:
But at last I looked up
And there were the stars!
Like cherries they were
In the orchards of night,
All yellow and red,
All shining and bright.

The sparks of the bonfires
Of seven dear saints,
The gems of the host
In the harness of heaven,
The pickets of embers
Whose orbits are long
And wind cannot take them.

I stopped in my tracks,
And "Look you," I said,
"This is over and done.
She will have to be told,
God forgive me the telling,
I'll travel no more
To the door of her dwelling
Through any such going
Nor blunt my good axe
On the face of the stone."

A Brecon Version

Whoever Trystan drew blood on,
That man surely fell.
Whoever drew blood on Trystan,
That man also fell.
King March sent to King Arthur
How to loose that spell.

Trystan took Queen Essylt
To Celyddon's green wood.
Trystan took Queen Essylt
In Celyddon's green wood.
King March rode to King Arthur,
Burning as he rode.

King Arthur gave him counsel:
"The only thing to do,
The only thing for you
Is send him many harpers
To play him from afar,
And poets to praise him near."

King March sent poets and harpers
Who did as they were told,
And Trystan gave them silver,
And Trystan gave them gold.
Then they brought Gwalchmai to him
In a corselet all of gold,

Gwalchmai, son of Gwyar,
Chief peacemaker of them all.
Gwalchmai, son of Gwyar,
Took Trystan to Arthur's hall.
Arthur made peace between them,
Trystan and King March.

He spoke with both together,
He spoke with each apart.
Trystan said he wanted
Queen Essylt with all his heart.
King March said he wanted
Queen Essylt with all his heart.

King Arthur said one should have her
While the leaves were on the trees,
And the other one should have her
While the leaves were off the trees.
He gave King March the choosing,
Since he her husband was.

King March said he would have her
When the leaves were off the trees.
He said the nights were longer
When the leaves were off the trees.
King March bethought him clever
Leaving summer to her lover.

When Arthur told Queen Essylt,
She said, "O blessèd be
The judgment and its giver!"

She made her courtesy
And rose up from her knee,
And danced and sang to the measure:

“There are three trees that are good,
Holly, yew, and ivy-wood.
There are three trees that keep
Their leaves forever and always,
And always and forever
With Trystan I will sleep.”

Rhiannon's Air

I go my errand
In my own manner:
By land or water
In my own way
I go my quest
And the light falls, lightly.

And all my warblers
Make such sweet music
No man who hears
Can be a warrior
For eighty years
And the light falls, lightly.

Across the meadows,
Through woodland shadows,
By night or day
In my own way
I go my errand
And the light falls, lightly.

So follow me slowly,
O my dear pursuer,
Only remember
In my own way
I go my quest
And the light falls, lightly.

The Cynneddf

After a banquet
Powyll of Dyfed
With many attending
Strolled to a hillock
Back of the palace.

"Lord," said a courtier,
"Here is a strangeness:
If you sit on this mound
One of two things
Will certainly happen
Before you depart,—
The hurt of a wound
Or the sight of a wonder."

"I fear no wound,"
Said Powyll of Dyfed
"With this host all around me,
And as for a wonder,
Gladly I'd see one,
For wonders were ever
Dear to my heart."

He sat on the mound,
And a lady came riding,

Lovely to look at
In garments of gold
On a cream-colored stallion.
She rode very slowly,
She sang sweet and low,
And no one there knew her.

Powyll of Dyfed
Followed on foot
And could not overtake her,
And sent for the sorrel,
Most fleet of his stable,
Mounted and rode
By cairn and by cromlech.

Salmon and eagle,
The owl and the ousel,
From rock and from river,
From water, from air,
Watched the pursuit,
Pursued and pursuer.

Weary of riding,
Powyll of Dyfed
Cried in despair
To the beautiful lady,
"Stay, in the name
Of the one you love best!"

She reined in, smiling,
Turned to him, told him,

"Had you said so the sooner,
You would have spared
Your spirited sorrel
A great deal of anguish,"
And she took off her veil.

Of all of the maidens
And all of the women
He ever had seen,
This was the fairest.
Powyll of Dyfed
Came to her side,

Said to her, "Lady,
Receive my greeting,
And what is your journey?"
—"I go my own errand
In my own manner."
—"Oh, what is your quest?"
—"You," she replied.

It would be a big lie
To say they were happy
For ever and ever:
Boredom, depression,
Sometimes would settle
Even in Narberth,
And now and again
The hurt of a wound
That time could not always
Stifle or soften,

But every so often
And over and over,
They would see from the mound
A wonder go by.



APPENDIX



Appendix

I. THE TWENTY-FOUR OFFICIAL METERS.

(I follow the description given by Gwyn Williams, in *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry*, Faber & Faber, London, 1953. The order corresponds with that in which the poems appear in the preceding pages.)

1. Cyhydedd fer. Simply, a rhymed couplet of 8-syllable lines, well-known to us from Marvell, Herrick, and many others. The Welsh, as will appear later, are fond of using it as a base, starting with it, then breaking into combinations of 10 and 6, or 9 and 7, and so on.
2. Englyn penfyr. A stanza of three lines, of ten, seven, and seven syllables. One, two, or three syllables occur at the end of the first line after the main rhyme, and these are echoed by rhyme, alliteration, or assonance, in the first half of the second line.
3. Englyn milwr. A stanza of three lines, on one rhyme, with seven syllables to each line.
4. Englyn unodl union. A four line stanza, ten, six, seven, and seven syllables respectively. As in Englyn penfyr, the first line has one, two, or three syllables after the main rhyme, and these are echoed in the beginning of line two.
5. Englyn unodl crwca. This is also a four line stanza, reversing the pattern of Englyn unodl union, in that the syllable count of the lines runs seven, seven, ten, six, respectively. The same principles apply in the echoing of the syllables that follow the main rhyme in the long line.

6. Englyn cyrch. A four line, seven-syllable stanza. Lines one, two, and four rhyme, and line three rhymes into the middle of line four.
7. Englyn proest dalgron. Four lines, seven syllables to the line, off-rhyming on vowels or diphthongs. The quantity of the rhymed syllables must be the same, either all long, or all short.
8. Englyn lleddfbroest. Four lines, seven syllables to the line. The rhymes must be the four diphthongs ae, oe, wy, ei. Impossible to reproduce in English, so I have had to make do with what diphthongs our language has at its disposal.
9. Englyn proest gadwynog. Also four lines, seven syllables. Lines one and three rhyme; lines two and four off-rhyme with one and three, and with each other.
10. Awdl gywydd. A quatrain of seven-syllable lines, lines two and four rhyming, lines one and three rhyming into the third, fourth, or fifth syllable of lines two and four.
11. Cywydd deuair hirion. Couplets, in seven-syllable lines, rhyming a stressed with an unstressed syllable. My "Cymric Love Song" is inaccurate, in that the lines do not contain the full quota of seven syllables.
12. Cywydd deuair fyrion. A rhymed four-syllable couplet.
13. Cywydd llosgyrnog. A six-line stanza, the syllables running eight, eight, seven; eight, eight, seven. Lines one and two rhyme with the middle of line three; lines four and five with the middle of line six; and three and six rhyme with each other.
14. Rhupunt. A line of three, four, or five sections, of four syllables each. All but the last section rhyme with each other; the last section carries the main rhyme. Each section may be written as a separate line, as in my example.
15. Byr a thoddaid. This measure combines the eight-syllable couplet with another type of couplet, called toddaid byr. The latter consists of ten syllables, then six; in the ten-syllable line the main rhyme is found before the

- end, as with many of the Englyn forms, and the syllables that follow the main rhyme in the long line must be linked with the early syllables, by alliteration, rhyme, or assonance, of the first part of the six-syllable line.
16. Clogyrnach. This form also begins with an eight-syllable couplet, followed by lines of five, five, three, three, syllables each, though the three, three pair may be written as one six-syllable line. The five-syllable lines rhyme with each other, and with the first of the threes; the second three rhymes with the original couplet.
 17. Cyhydedd Naw Ban. A nine-syllable line, rhyming in couplets, and often continuing the same rhyme through the entire stanza.
 18. Cyhydedd Hir. Lines of five, five, five, and four syllables (sometimes arranged as single nineteen syllable lines), the first three lines rhyming with each other, the fourth, or shorter line, or section, carrying the main rhyme.
 19. Toddaid. Quatrains, alternating between ten-syllable and nine-syllable lines. A syllable toward the end of the first line rhymes into the middle of the second, and the same effect is reproduced in lines three and four. Lines two and four rhyme with each other.
 20. Gwawdodyn. This form begins with the nine-syllable couplet, Cyhydedd naw ban, described above, then goes on with either Toddaid or Cyhydedd hir. In my example, the stanzas alternate in the employment of the latter two types in lines three and four of each stanza.
 21. Gwawdodyn hir. This is the same as the above, except that the stanza begins with two nine-line couplets before breaking into Toddaid or Cyhydedd hir.
 22. Hir a thoddaid. A ten-syllable quatrain followed by a Toddaid.
 23. Cyrch a chwta. A stanza of six seven-syllable lines followed by an Awdl gywydd couplet.
 24. Tawddgyrch cadwynog. The scheme is like that of a Rhupunt, except that the rhymes appear in A, B, B, C, order.

II. CYNGHANEDD. HARMONY, INTERLOCKING.

(I follow the explanation given by A. S. D. Smith (Caradar) in the Third Part of *Welsh Made Easy*, without, however, going into the complications of rising and falling rhythms, so-called.)

- A. Cynghanedd Draws. In this form of cynghanedd, alliteration is required only at the beginning and end of the line, the middle portion being by-passed. "A cat may look at a king." Or, "he rode to the city of Rome."
- B. Cynghanedd Groes. Here, all the first half of the line must alliterate with all the second half. "On a settee in a city."
- C. Cynghanedd Sain. Two words within the line must rhyme, and the second of them alliterate, but not rhyme, with the last word. "In the park, in the dark, I dare."
- D. Cynghanedd Lusk. The last syllable of some word in the earlier part of the line must rhyme with the next to the last syllable of the last word, which must be a word of two or more syllables with the accent on the next to the last syllable. "Begin to sing in winter."

The poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins contains many instances of the use of Cynghanedd; the poem called *Inversnaid*, in particular, might well repay the reader who is interested in studying these effects.

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